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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the analogy between the linguistic Romanization of Europe and the Hispanization of America, this paper attempts to investigate the validity of the so-called substream theory to account for the development and diversification of the Romance languages. Phonetic peculiarities of Spanish in America are analyzed, and it is concluded that substratum influences do not adequately account for these features. Therefore, it is deduced that the substratum theory as an explanation of the transformation of Latin into the Romance languages is not confirmed by the development of Spanish in America. (Author/AM)

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CONCERNING THE INFLUENCE OF NATIVE AMERICAN LANGUAGES ON AMERICAN SPANISH*

Since the sixteenth century, students of language have been aware that the Romance languages were modern forms of Latin that by divergent development had become different languages. But already in the sixteenth century, as now, philologists were not content simply to record this fact. They wanted an explanation, a cause for language change in general and for the occurrence of different changes in different places. The explanation put forth by many at that time was that the barbarian invasions that had destroyed the Roman Empire had also caused the corruption of the language. But as early as 1612 it was proposed that not only the barbarian (Germanic) invaders were responsible for the "corruption" of Latin. One must assume, it was proposed, that when Latin was first brought to the conquered provinces of the Empire, the inhabitants of those provinces must have learned it somewhat imperfectly, retaining some features of their native languages, especially features of pronunciation: i.e., a foreign accent.

That both pre-Latin languages (like Gaulish in France and Iberian in Spain) and the languages of the later Germanic invaders (the Franks in France, the Visigoths in Spain) caused the breakdown of Latin into the Romance languages seems to have been generally accepted at the beginning of the 19th century. Later in the century it was clear to most serious students of language that linguistic change can and does occur quite without any external pressures, but the idea that linguistic change can be

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produced by contact between different languages was still retained and the terms substratum and superstratum were coined to designate what were assumed to be two clearly distinct types of language contact. Substratum and superstratum came to be defined in terms like these: "A superstratum is an invading group that blends into another group already inhabiting a territory and speaking another language. When the relationship is reversed, when it is the settled group that gives up its language, even though it is numerically stronger, one calls it a substratum." (Von Wartburg 1943) "By substratum I mean a linguistic layer which is eventually superseded by the language that comes to predominate; in the same sense a superstratum is a linguistic layer on top of the predominating language. Thus, e.g., Keltic is the substratum of Latin in Gaul, while Frankish is its superstratum." (Pulgram 1958) Some scholars (e.g. Blaylock 1960, Izzo 1973) have pointed out that if substratum and superstratum are thus understood, there is really no linguistically significant difference between them, that the only real difference is whether the "stratum" language was being used already in a given territory when the "main-stream" language was brought in or the "main-stream" language was already there when speakers of the "stratum" language arrived. But in spite of the undiscriminating definition and aside from the metaphorically implied layers, there is a distinction between the two concepts, usually unstated, often more or less unconsciously held by scholars who seem to work with explicit definitions in terms of chronologically applied layers. Because the substratum speakers of the Roman

Empire were conquered peoples and were, in the ordinary case, far more numerous than the Roman administrators, merchants and settlers who came into their territory (and from whom they learned the Latin language), Romance scholars hold implicit in their concept of substratum that substratum languages are the languages of subjugated peoples who learn a new language from a socio-politically dominant group represented by only a relatively small number of persons. And since in the Romance-speaking world the superstratum languages are chiefly the languages of the Germanic invaders who conquered various areas during the 5th to the 7th centuries, superstratum language is understood to be the language of a conquering and temporarily politically-dominant minority. Thus as actually used, the terms substratum and superstratum have not only a rather unimportant chronological-geographical meaning but also an important sociolinguistic significance which should of course be made explicit and be clearly distinguished from the other meanings. Even more important, however, is that most scholars conceive of superstratum influence as ordinary linguistic borrowing, the voluntary, more or less conscious imitation of words, turns of phrase, etc. of another language: the sort of thing we can see happening under our own eyes today (as when English speakers start using Spanish patio, plaza, or Fr. chaise longue, etc. or when French speakers adopt from English le jazz, le weekend, etc.) But substratum influence is thought of as unintentional, unconscious carryover of native language speech habits into the new language. It is, in short, imperfect learning, speaking the new language with a

foreign accent--a thing quite different from ordinary linguistic borrowing, which linguists understand well, and more akin to creolization, which is poorly understood.

In the Romance speaking countries of Europe, where little is known of the pre-Latin languages but their names and where the first attestations of the Romance languages appear 700 to 1000 years after the presumable extinction of the substratum languages, it is easy for substratum enthusiasts (substratomaniacs) to attribute all sorts of sound changes to substratum influence. (E.g., Fr. [u] > [ü], as in cuba > Sp. cuba but Fr. cuve, has been attributed to Gaulish; and Sp [f] > [h], as in fabulare > Sp. hablar vs. Port. falar, furnus > Sp. horno vs. Fr. four, is claimed to be due to the inability of the Iberians to pronounce [f], to cite but two cases out of a dozen or more. Of course, there have also been skeptics, who have objected to the facile attribution of sound changes to practically unknown languages; but in most instances lack of decisive evidence has prevented them from making an airtight case.

The Hispanization of America is in many ways analogous to the Romanization of Europe, but much of the information that we lack in the case of European Romanization is known or can be found out in the case of the Hispanization of Latin America. Consequently it should be easier to show whether important features of the indigenous languages have survived, and it should be possible to form some judgment about the validity of the so-called substratum theory as a cause of the changes and diversification of the Romance languages.

There have, in fact, been plenty of attributions of Latin American peculiarities - especially of pronunciation - to the influence of native American languages. Before mentioning any of them, however, I wish to remark that the two best-known features of American Spanish are not and never have been attributed to Indian influence. I refer to the general Spanish American lack of distinction between /θ/ and /s/ (as in cazar/casar, cierra/sierra) and between /ʎ/ and /y/ (as in malla/maya). These features are fully accounted for in the history of Peninsular Spanish and need not detain us.

The first notable attempt to explain American phonetic features as the result of Indian influence was the work of a German phonetician named Rudolf Lenz, published in 1893. Lenz came to the remarkable conclusion that "in the main, the Spanish spoken by the common people of Chile is Spanish with Araucanian sounds." Lenz's opinion was accepted by Meyer-Lübke, the leading Romance philologist of his generation, who cited it in his influential Introduction to Romance Linguistics in 1901, and by Otto Jespersen, who discussed it as a clinical case in his Language of 1921.

That Lenz succeeded in convincing Meyer-Lubke and Jespersen, who were both generally skeptical of substratum influence, is to the credit of his ability to present a persuasive case, not to his abilities as a Hispanist. It seems that Lenz came to Chile well trained in phonetics but with only a classroom knowledge of Spanish. He observed features in Chilean pronunciation that he had not known about, and he presented them in a

long monograph together with facts about the conquest and settlement of Chile which he thought had favored the survival of Araucanian speech habits. The chief Chilean features attributed to Araucanian by Lenz where affricated pronunciation of /tr/ (otro, tren), assibilated pronunciation of /rr/ (carro, perro), and aspiration of syllable-final /s/ (mismo, hasta, bosque). The fact that Lenz called this last "the most notable of all Chilean changes" and "the most curious aspect of Chilean phonetics" is enough to destroy his credibility in the eyes of anyone even slightly familiar with Hispanic dialectology, for the aspiration of /s/ is common to almost half of Spain and most of the lowland areas of Spanish America. In normal, unaffected speech it is probably used by more speakers than the supposedly normal [s]. All the other supposed Araucanian substitutions of Chilean Spanish are also widespread in the Spanish-speaking world, occurring both in Spain and in other points in Spanish America.

Spanish and Latin American scholars attacked Lenz's thesis almost at once, but it continued to be cited for over four decades until Amado Alonso in 1939 examined and carefully refuted every detail of it. One cannot help lamenting the effort that was required to undo what never should have been done in the first place.

Araucanian substratum influence on the Spanish of Chile is fortunately now a dead issue, but there are other cases that are still alive, some in fact newly conceived. Just ten years ago the Swedish Hispanist and phonetician Bertil Malmberg attributed

to Aztec influence the Central Mexican tendency to trill syllable-final /r/ (parte, hablar) and to omit unstressed vowels between /č/ or /s/ and final /s/ (lonches, gracias). A Mexican phonetician immediately countered the first by pointing out that Aztec has no r at all, either trilled or flapped. Early Aztec borrowings from Spanish replaced both /r/ and /rr/ by /l/ (xenola, xalo for señora and jarro). It could also have been pointed out that there is nothing particularly Mexican about /rr/ in syllable-final position. I have observed it in Spaniards, Argentinians, and many others; and also in Portuguese speakers from both Portugal and Brazil.

As for the matter of lonches etc., it is apparently a recent innovation, for it was not mentioned in an excellent description of Mexican pronunciation written at the turn of the century. Moreover, it is in conflict with the structure of Aztec, which permits only one consonant at the end of a syllable.

It has always struck me as incongruous that substratum languages should be invoked for conservation as well as for change, but it has been done both for Latin in Spain and for Spanish in Mexico. Intervocalic /d/ tends to weaken and fall in most varieties of Spanish, including the supposedly pure varieties of Madrid and Bogotá; and /-s/, as I mentioned earlier, is aspirated in much of the Spanish-speaking world. The central plateau of Mexico, however, does not share these tendencies. Because it preserves both /-d-/ and /-s/, it is said that these sounds are reinforced (not merely preserved), and the reason is Aztec substratum. Aztec had /s/ but so did Spanish when Mexico was conquered. Aztec did not have /d/,

however, so it is impossible to understand how Aztec can be responsible for the allegedly reinforced /-d-/ of highland Mexican Spanish.

There is only one area of Latin America where the assumption of indigenous influence on pronunciation seems at least plausible, namely Paraguay. In that country Guaraní is said to have equal prestige with Spanish and to be spoken by nearly all the population. Nevertheless, even for Paraguay the alleged influences are minor - almost trifling - and they are contested. Bertil Malmberg states that "Paraguayan intonation is very un-Spanish." This is vague and proves nothing. There are considerable intonational differences in Spain itself. At the least, one would have to analyze the intonational patterns of Guaraní speakers who have not been exposed to the influence of Spanish and compare them with the patterns of Paraguayan Spanish and non-Paraguayan Spanish. Although the case is admittedly quite different, we should consider how much we would be impressed if a Polish phonetician were to tell us that the intonation of Alberta English has been influenced by Blackfoot, because it is not like the intonation of London English.

Malmberg also claims that Paraguayan affricated pronunciation of /y/ (mayo, paraguayo, huye) and an alveolar pronunciation of /t/ and /d/, which he has observed, are Guarani features. The first of these may be due to the conservative influence of school teachers who exaggerate the distinction between vowel + vowel (vao, leí, etc.) and vowel + yod + vowel (leyó, ensaye, etc.) a distinction which tends to be lost in many places,

especially among uneducated speakers. Or it may be a Spanish regionalism that is preserved in Paraguay, for affricated /y/ has been recorded in many other parts of the Spanish-speaking world. Moreover, Paul Cassano has argued that early descriptions of Guarani do not seem to indicate that Guaraní had the sound in question. Hence it seems possible that Spanish may have influenced the pronunciation of Guaraní rather than vice versa.

The alveolar /d/ and /t/ are also open to doubt. After mentioning the two sounds in general, Malmberg seems to hedge a little, emphasizing their alveolarity only after /r/. Since /r/ is always alveolar or even post-alveolar (it cannot be pronounced as a dental) there's nothing surprising or un-Spanish about the assimilation of a following /t/ or /d/ to the same point of articulation. And Cassano, again, questions whether Guaraní sounds could have produced the alleged effect, pointing out that Guarani /t/ and /d/ have been described as palatal, not alveolar, and their distribution is quite different from that of Spanish /t, d/.

In sum, we find that in almost every case of alleged substratum influence the investigator has operated with insufficient knowledge of Hispanic dialectology and/or ignorance of the alleged substratum language, attributing to the influence of an indigenous language characteristics which originated in Spain and/or which the indigenous language did not (or does not) possess. Thus we come down from Rudolf Lenz's "Spanish spoken with Araucanian sounds" eighty years ago to a few almost imperceptible changes in points of articulation which perhaps

(but only perhaps) may be due to imperfect learning of Spanish by native speakers of indigenous American languages.

In regard to vocabulary, the situation seems to be entirely different, for American Spanish and Portuguese contain hundreds of Indian words. I cannot go into this matter now because I have used up all my time talking about pronunciation. I want to point out before closing, however, that even in vocabulary we do not seem to have much, if in fact any substratum influence in the sense of involuntary persistence of native speech habits because of imperfect learning of the new language. What we have is simple linguistic borrowing, much greater in scale but not different in kind from the process by which North American English acquired words like hickory, pecan, chipmunk, moose, muskrat, skunk, totem, squaw, moccasin, tomahawk, teepee. Exactly like the Anglo-American borrowings, the Spanish-American borrowings generally are names of plants, animals, features of the land, or of Indian culture, for which the Europeans had no words before they arrived. In both the English and the Spanish cases the words were adapted completely to the phonetics of the European language, and words from various Indian languages were adopted and thought of as simply Indian, without distinction as to particular language; and usually the first native term adopted for a thing became the name for that thing, no matter what other terms were met later. (So we call a Blackfoot house by the Dakota word tepee, and a Mexican may refer to his girlfriend with the Quechua word china.) Thus even though Mexican has a number of Aztec words peculiar to itself (camote, hule, sinsonte, zopilote, etc.) and Peruvian has certain special words from

Quechua, etc., the Carib or Arawak words canoa, cacique, huracán, tabaco, maíz are used almost everywhere, far from their origin in the Antilles, as are the Aztec words tomate, chocolate, cacao, potate, tamal and the Quechua words cóndor, quina, coca, pampa.

It appears, in short, that native Americans, although far more numerous than their Spanish conquerers, changed Spanish very little, if at all, by their failure to learn the invaders' language well, that the only items of the Indian languages that have come into American Spanish are those that Spanish speakers voluntarily accepted, and that therefore the so-called substratum theory as an explanation of the transformation of Latin into the Romance languages is not confirmed by the development of Spanish in America.

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